

# Spirits rejoice at Alden barn raising

Historic John Alden House gets special treat with old-fashioned barn raising

By Joseph Marois

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DUXBURY — They came to the historic John Alden House Museum on a gorgeous Saturday wearing orange and yellow hardhats and smiles. By mid-afternoon, they stood atop an old-fashioned post and beam barn they had just pegged together without so much as a 16-penny nail.

Hundreds of residents and on-lookers flowed on and off the Alden property all day to watch the volunteers work with Ted Benson and a crew from Benson Woodworking as together they erected the wooden frame using ancient techniques.

Combined with the smell of charcoal grills, the sweet odor of freshly hewn beams and a bright and warming sun, the tenor at the

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Alden barn raising was captured when youngsters and senior citizens alike cheered in unison as the structure went up.

To be fair, there were a few anomalies amid the beams and pegs and sledgehammers, with the whine and hum of the occasional power saw and the rattling of aluminum ladders, but even the presence of "high-tech" couldn't take away the feeling that time had somehow been reversed on this pleasant Duxbury afternoon.

"This is not a replica," said Benson, a leading expert on the construction of timber frame buildings. "This is exactly the way they built these structures back in 1653." Benson pointed out in a brief ceremony that community barn raisings were uniquely an American tradition the Pilgrims

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began.

"A timber frame building like this would have been raised in France or England by professionals," he said. "What we're doing today takes us back to the roots of why this country was started. What made John Alden and others come to America was the opportunity to create a new country with new ideals. Communities came together to help each other out."

Alden House curator Linda Ashley, garbed in Pilgrim attire, delivered a benediction at the event.

"May God grant that as we build barns on Earth, we shall not neglect to build mansions for our souls," she said.

Reverend Steven Turrell also blessed the structure.

"This is really history evolving," said selectmen chairman Andre Martecchini. "A hundred years from now people will look back and say it's just another building built by the people of Duxbury," he said.

Volunteer and former Alden Kindred president Jim Tiffin asked those in attendance to remember longtime resident and Alden descendant Gloria Howe.

"Mrs. Howe left the seed money in her will to start this project. It was (she) who mentioned over ten years ago that we should rebuild the barn," said Tiffin.

In addition to Tiffin, several other direct descendants of John and Priscilla Alden worked on the barn raising. They were John Howe with son Sean, John C. Alden with his son James, Robert Chatfield, and Richard Randall. "I think for the day we all feel a part of the family," Benson said.

"It's not just a ceremony -- it's real physical work," said museum director Bob Edmunds. "This could be dangerous," concurred

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Benson Woodworking foreman Ben Brungraber, before pegs were stuffed in peg holes and the hammers drove them home.

"But if everyone works together we should be all right," he said.

The workers were divided into teams and took their places for the raising of the first beam. With cheers from the crowd of spectators, the first section was lifted and pulled into place around 9 a.m.

"It's a pretty exciting day for everyone," said general contractor and Duxbury resident James Macnab. "The pitch of the roof will match the Alden House roof. It's quite a tall structure." The work continued late into the afternoon.

The entire structure, designed by Hingham architect Bill Thayer, was held together with oak pegs so no metal fasteners will be visible in the frame. However, metal fasteners did join the center beams together. As they were being driven in one young spectator cried out, "You're cheating."

"It's a reflection of the modern building code. They are used for hurricane protection," Brungraber was quick to point out, adding that without them the structure wouldn't pass the building code.

Throughout the day, the Boy Scouts of troop 110 in Hingham were hard at work cooking burgers and hot dogs. Even their

prices were a throwback to earlier days — a burger with chips and soda for \$3. The money they raised will go to fund scouting activities. Edmunds pointed out that many of the scouts were from Duxbury so it was really a localized troop on hand.

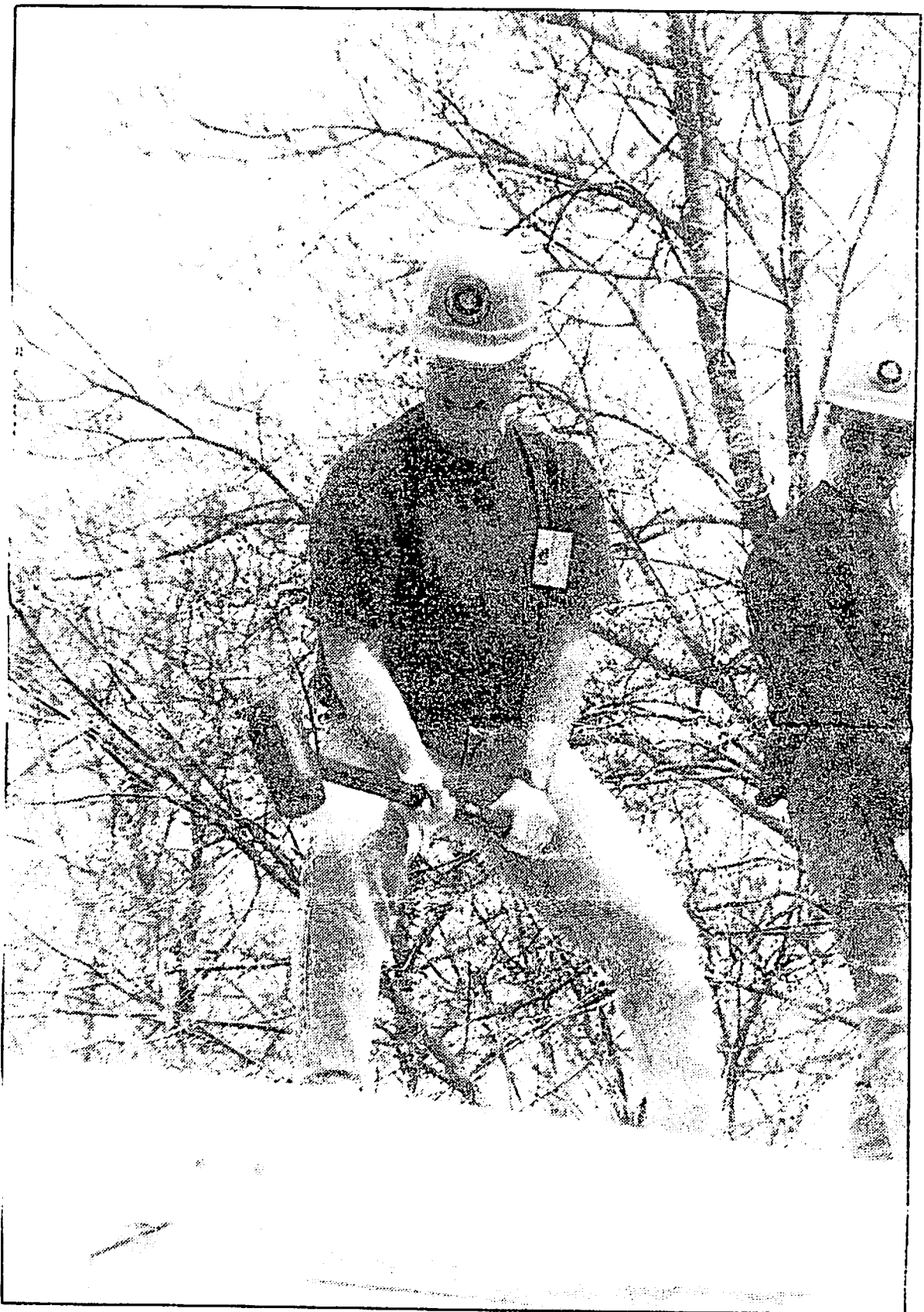
Sunny skies uplifted spirits in spite of previous forecasts of rain. As the event went on all day, many people came and watched at different times. The Alden House Museum was open for tours and the Alden Kindred held an auction of Alden House replicas. By the end of the day the barn frame was clearly visible and people were able to get a sense of the size of the structure.

"We wanted to make sure that the barn wasn't so large as to take attention away from the house, which is the real historic building," said Tiffin.



Staff photo/Joseph Marois

**Up and away** — Workers and volunteers hoist up one side of the barn at the historic John Alden House Museum Saturday morning.



**Hammering history** — Residents and onlookers came out in droves Saturday to watch workers and volunteers hammer together old-fashioned pegs and beams at the historic John Alden House barn raising. Staff photo John Cook